

So Yaakov set out with all that he had and he came to Beer-Sheva. (46:1)

The *Midrash* asks where Yaakov *Avinu* went. *Chazal* respond, *Lakutz arazim*, “To cut down the cedar trees which his grandfather, Avraham *Avinu*, planted in Beer Sheva.” I have referred to this *Midrash* a number of times, but upon perusing it again, I am struck with two questions. Yaakov is on his way to greet his long-lost son, Yosef, for whom he had mourned for twenty-two years. Can one ever begin to imagine the excitement that coursed through the Patriarch at this time? His son that he had given up for dead was not only alive, but had achieved the epitome of monarchy in the most depraved country in the world! Imagine, a Jew, reviled and castigated by the world, accomplishes the impossible – and is revered, admired and even loved! Yaakov must have been bursting with joy, effusive in his excitement. One would expect him to take the quickest route and use the speediest means of travel. Why did he make a stop in Beer Sheva to cut down cedar trees? If his goal was to transport these trees to Egypt, he could have sent his sons. Alternatively, once he had reached Egypt, had seen Yosef, and had spent some quality time with him, he could have taken a short trip to Beer Sheva to retrieve the trees. Making Beer Sheva part of his itinerary raised eyebrows. Apparently, an important lesson can be derived from here.

Second, if Yaakov felt it that important for him to go to Beer Sheva – fine – but why did he include his entire entourage in his trip? Why did his entire family have to accompany him on his tree-cutting expedition? Apparently, this was no simple event. It was a lesson for generations, to be passed on to his progeny, and they to theirs.

Yaakov went to retrieve the cedars planted by Avraham. These cedars would one day be the *Kerashim*, Beams, of the *Mishkan*. The cedars represented the most vital component in *Klal Yisrael's* fabric – the Torah. Without the foundation of the Torah, Yaakov could not have gone down to Egypt. Yes, he missed his son, but love for a child must be predicated upon the foundation set forth by the Torah. Children must know that their parents love them, but that they love Hashem even more. Children must know and appreciate the value of Torah. In order for children to appreciate Torah's value, they must observe this feeling emanating from their parents.

Yaakov's children saw him as a loving father whose transcendental values of eternity superseded even his love of them. Furthermore, the children saw that his values were a legacy from the past. It was his grandfather who had planted the cedars which Yaakov would now transplant on Egyptian soil – for his future descendants to take with them into the wilderness. When they built the *Mishkan*, it was raised upon the foundation which Avraham and Yaakov had established.

This was the lesson that Yaakov wanted to impart to his family. Unless they stood by and watched, it would have had very little meaning. There is nothing like firsthand perception, actively seeing it.

I recently had occasion to see a young student attending *shul* on *Shabbos*, away from home. He

was alone in *shul* with some friends. He never left his seat, *davening* the entire time, not even conversing with his friends, who were not maintaining perfect decorum. I wondered what secret ingredient his parents possessed: what had they put into his cereal; what “threats” had they imposed on him? Upon sharing my feeling with the boy’s mother, she explained that her son had not been allowed to go to *shul* on *Shabbos* until he had been able and prepared to sit out the entire session next to his father and *daven*. The boy had been taught values when he saw his father *daven*. When children, regrettably, see their father sleeping late and arriving at the end of *Shacharis* for the Torah reading, or just in time to join in the festivities at the *kiddush* club, he receives an entirely different lesson. Our children remember what we show them. When they see us talking in *shul* – they will talk. When they see us *davening* – they will *daven*. We are the first line of defense for our children’s positive growth. Unfortunately, we can also be the greatest offenders.